PROVISIONAL

E/1997/SR.28
21 July 1997

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Substantive session of 1997

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 28th MEETING
(FIRST PART)*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 15 July 1997, at 3.00 p.m.

President: Mr. GALUSKA (Czech Republic)

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REGIONAL COOPERATION (continued)

* The summary record of the second part of the meeting appears as document E/1997/SR.28/Add.1.

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GE.97-63183 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

REGIONAL COOPERATION (agenda item 10) (continued) (E/1997/5, 40 and Add.1, 41-45 and 51)

Review and reform of the regional commissions

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), speaking as current coordinator of the regional commissions, introduced the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (E/1997/40 and Add.1). He drew the Council's attention to the summaries of the regional economic surveys (E/1997/41-45), all of which contained information on and analyses of important regional issues. Taken together with the annual reports of the commissions' sessions, they provided the Council with a detailed account of the reforms taking place within the commissions and the work they had done since the Council's last session.

As requested by General Assembly resolution 50/227 and Council resolution 1996/41, the regional commissions had provided the Council with an in-depth account of their respective reform processes, processes which represented a systematic effort to adapt to changing needs and to reaffirm the relevance of the commissions to their respective regions.

Section I of the report covered all aspects of those reforms as well as other important features, such as their intergovernmental structures, including all recent changes, their relationships with other entities within the United Nations system and their relationships and cooperation with other regional and subregional organizations.

Section II, on trends and activities, shed light on the role of the regional commissions in fostering regional cooperation on the basis of their respective comparative advantages. They served as focal points for ensuring that regionalism and multilateralism were mutually complementary and compatible. In respect of recent global conferences, they had had a major responsibility in the preparation of regional plans and programmes and remained very active in the regional follow-up and implementation of global commitments.

In the report of the Executive Secretaries (E/1997/40, annex), several issues were brought to the attention of the Council for consideration and guidance. Among them was the question whether the commissions should continue to engage in both normative and operational activities. Their respective

intergovernmental bodies continued to support the Commission's role as providers of services in a cost-effective manner. The Committee on Programme and Coordination (CPC), at its recent session, had clearly endorsed their activities under the regular programme of technical cooperation. It was recognized, however, that the linkages between the commissions' technical cooperation activities and the activities of the United Nations funds and programmes needed to be strengthened, in particular within the framework of the country strategy notes (CSN). Those linkages were also among the issues being considered by the Council under other items of its agenda.

The executive secretaries welcomed the call for a better structural relationship between the Council and the regional commissions. All believed it to be essential and measures had been proposed in that regard. They fully supported the Secretary-General's statement that the participation of the regional commissions should ensure that global and regional aspects of development were harmonized and brought to bear, in a complementary way, on the substantive support to the Council. The challenge was how to put that into effect.

Mr. GRAFF (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the members of the European Union, said that the reform of the regional commissions was one of the Council's major concerns. The framework and purpose of that reform was set out in the relevant paragraphs of General Assembly resolution 50/227 and Council resolution 1996/41. The Council would need to decide at its current session on possible future action to achieve those objectives in the light of the results already obtained.

The Union had noted with satisfaction the efforts of the regional commissions to review their programmes of work and rationalize their structures. In particular, it hailed the reforms undertaken by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). Two years of consultations at all levels on the future orientation of its work, its organizational structure and work programme, had resulted in the adoption of a global reform package. Staff had been redeployed and the Commission itself opened to the private sector, which was playing an active part in carrying out various activities and financing some of them. Reform was, of course, an ongoing process, but there were

grounds for satisfaction with the results to date. The Council should concentrate on the implementation of the reforms already approved, to which the ECE organs could be expected to contribute.

The report of the executive secretaries rightly stressed that each regional commission must respond first to the needs and situations in its own region. The report was more descriptive than forward-looking, however, and contained relatively few recommendations on the commissions' future role. The Union believed that the reform and restructuring should be guided by certain principles: the regional specificity of each commission should be emphasized by its respective member States in defining priorities and work programmes; each commission should determine its field of activity in the light of those of other regional bodies, so as to define those niches to which it could bring real added value; the evaluation of the resources to be assigned to the regional commissions, which currently received almost 15 per cent of the regular budget, should be based on objective criteria.

The Council was called upon to ensure complementarity and coordination of work among the various regional economic commissions, between them and the functional commissions, and with the regional offices of the funds and programmes. The Secretary-General's report on operational activities for development also dealt with the latter, and due consideration should be given to it in the discussion. The executive secretaries had expressed a desire to see their links with the regional offices of the funds and programmes further developed.

It was noteworthy that the executive secretaries felt that their current link with the country strategy frameworks was a weak point in their operational role. The Union believed, however, that the regional commissions should concentrate mainly on their normative role and less on operational activities, which often cut across those of the funds and programmes and of the specialized agencies. Activities which did not result in value added in terms of development activities or which had lost their *raison d'être* should be terminated. Limits should be set on the mandates of the regional commissions with regard to operational activities outside their normative and analytical functions. The Council might well also take up the progressive decentralization of Headquarters resources and functions to the regions, as well as appropriate financial control mechanisms.

As far as the follow-up to the major international conferences was concerned, the report described the actions undertaken by the various commissions in accordance with their respective mandates. The section of the report on the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was of particular interest.

The Union had also noted with interest the chapter on regional activities and interregional cooperation, which explained how cooperation took place between the various regional commissions. Unfortunately, however, it was not very detailed.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) commended the regional commissions' recent efforts to make the wide-ranging nature of their activities better known to the global public. As the Secretary-General had indicated in his statement to the high-level segment, greater emphasis needed to be placed on the participation of the regional commissions so as to ensure that the global and regional aspects of development were harmonized and brought to bear on the substantive support provided to the Council.

The Secretary-General's report (E/1997/40 and Add.1) gave a comprehensive picture of the reform process in the regional commissions. The focus was on: priority-setting and measures to enhance productivity and efficiency; the intergovernmental structure of the commissions, including the changes that had been made; the relationships of the commissions with other entities within the United Nations system; and lastly, their relationships with other regional organizations.

In that context, it was important that the Council should avoid trying to micro-manage the regional commissions. It should provide general guidance on the orientation of their programmes, which should be centred on their comparative advantages and the specific needs of their respective regions. The Council should also recommend strengthened coordination with regional and subregional bodies and with United Nations organizations engaged in activities at the regional level. The role of the commissions as coordinators of regional programmes should be strengthened.

The ongoing reform of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) had been reviewed by its member countries, including Bangladesh, and recently by its intergovernmental body. The commission's

conference system had been comprehensively restructured in 1992, and its secretariat activities correspondingly adjusted and re-evaluated. A thematic approach had been introduced, the impact of which had been extensively reviewed by the secretariat in 1996 and, more recently, by an intergovernmental meeting in February 1997. The replies of member countries to a questionnaire had also been taken into consideration. That process had proved very useful and could well be replicated elsewhere.

As a result of the review, it was agreed that the advantages of the thematic approach were still valid despite some weaknesses, and that the conference structure should be modified to make it more flexible and streamlined. It was also agreed that clear and realistic priorities should be set, adjusted to changing regional demands, and that resources should be directed towards clearly-identified priorities.

It was most important that the regional commissions should maintain their operational role as providers of services to their member countries in a cost-effective way, in particular to the developing and least developed countries (LDCs). In that area, the role of ESCAP as a provider of technical assistance based on high-quality multidisciplinary analyses was extremely important. Despite decreasing resources from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), donor countries, both regional and non-regional, had continued to commit extrabudgetary resources to ESCAP's technical cooperation activities. Member States and the United Nations should think seriously, therefore, about ways of enhancing the role of the regional commissions and promoting the national ownership of regional programmes, as recommended in General Assembly resolution 50/120.

In conclusion, he urged members to look closely at the resolutions and decisions contained in the addendum to the Secretary-General's report, many of which contained recommendations for action by the Council.

Ms. AGGREY-ORLEANS (Observer for Ghana) said that her delegation attached great importance to the role and work of the regional commissions and fully endorsed the Secretary-General's view that they were well placed to facilitate the promotion and implementation, at both the regional and national levels, of global commitments within the United Nations framework. A vast potential existed for regional cooperation for development and her delegation

welcomed the active engagement of the executive secretaries in reviewing cooperation modalities and exchanging views on the reform and restructuring of their commissions.

Her delegation noted with particular satisfaction the reforms initiated by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) aimed at renewing its intergovernmental machinery and programme orientation and priorities, as well as enhancing programme delivery through better managerial practice. The various levels of reform and restructuring of the secretariat had sharpened the ECA focus and led to increased efficiency and a greater impact of its programmes and activities. The results were already becoming evident. ECA outreach and service to member States were increasing and it was beginning to realize its potential as a regional policy centre, a networking link and a clearing house for best practices and development information. It should therefore be a more active participant in the meetings and discussions of the System-Wide Special Initiative for Africa.

Section II of the Secretary-General's report, on trends and activities, was a further indication of the regional commissions' role in promoting regional cooperation for development. The new strategic directions of ECA had been endorsed by the Conference of African Ministers for Economic and Social Development and Planning. The mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the programme for the Second Industrial Development Decade for Africa, and ECA activities under the African Information Society Initiative, were also to be commended.

The importance of those programmes and activities could not be overemphasized and her Government believed that, given the necessary support, ECA could contribute further to the implementation of various United Nations initiatives for the socio-economic development of Africa, particularly those best pursued at the regional level. Those efforts could not, of course, yield the expected results without adequate resources. The work undertaken by member countries of the region must be complemented by support from the entire international community.

Her delegation noted with appreciation ECA activities in the follow-up to global conferences. It was looking forward, in particular, to the Conference on Anti-Poverty Policies and Programmes in Africa, to be convened in 1999. It also noted the emphasis placed on implementing

the Beijing Platform for Action and the regional platform, and was gratified that the Commission had launched a Leadership Fund for African Women.

At its recent session, CPC had endorsed the programme budget proposals of the regional commissions for the biennium 1998-1999 and recommended their approval by the General Assembly and, during the consideration of other sections of the proposed programme budget, a number of delegations had emphasized the need to decentralize resources to the regional commissions. The technical cooperation aspect of their work should be strengthened.

The reference to ECA and the other regional commissions in the Secretary-General's statement to the high-level segment of the session was heartening, and her delegation fully agreed that the participation of the regional commissions ensured that the global and regional aspects of development were harmonized and brought to bear, in a complementary way, on the substantive support provided to the Council. It also supported the suggestion by the Administrator of UNDP that the regional commissions should have a stronger role as coordinators of regional programmes.

Mr. GRECU (Romania), having endorsed the statement by the spokesman for the European Union, said he would add to it a few remarks regarding ECE activities and its effort to adjust to the new state of affairs in Europe.

Globalization and the reform of the United Nations made the discussion of regional cooperation particularly timely. Recent political and economic developments offered a solid basis for the future long-term activities of the regional bodies. What was important at the current stage, particularly in connection with the reform process, was to identify the specific features of each region and supplement the relevant commissions' current mandates with elements responding to the new situation. The members of each commission should decide for themselves on the direction and content of the respective reforms.

Recent events in the United Nations system, especially the results of the series of major conferences held in the 1990s, would also have a part in establishing new mandates for the regional commissions. Each programme of action adopted contained provisions regarding cooperation and activities at the regional level, seen as intermediate between the national and the global levels. The coordinating role of all the regional commissions should

therefore be strengthened. Cooperation should be promoted between the members of each commission, and, in addition, the experience and expertise of the regional commissions should be taken into account by all the components of the United Nations system in establishing their own work programmes. Such cooperation and coordination might be a suitable future theme for the coordination segment of the Council's substantive session.

Since 1996, ECE had been engaged in far-reaching reforms to adapt itself to the new realities of the European continent: the transition to a market economy of the Central and Eastern European countries; the emergence of a group of States associated with the European Union which had embarked on the harmonization of their legislation, institutions and technology with a view to joining the Union; the establishment of the first forms and mechanisms of subregional cooperation; and, the attention accorded by other European bodies (OSCE, Council of Europe) to certain problems of the environment and of economic cooperation.

The main reform elements had led to an emphasis on ECE analytical, normative and technical-assistance activities in the light of the situation and needs of the countries with economies in transition. In that framework, cooperation with the subregional groups and subregional initiatives made it possible to maximize the benefits reaped from ECE expertise. A more active participation by ECE in the initiatives for the reconstruction and development of cooperation in the former Yugoslavia seemed both possible and necessary.

Mr. YAMPOLSKI (Observer for Ukraine), having expressed approval of United Nations restructuring efforts in the economic and social fields and welcomed the focus in the Secretary-General's report (E/1997/40) on the need to strengthen coordination between regional commissions and other regional players, said that regional cooperation was crucial to achieving a timely response to global development challenges and to ensuring that activities were tailored to specific country and regional situations.

ECE was facilitating the economic integration of the countries with economies in transition and assisting reforms in a range of areas including the modernization of industry and transport infrastructure, the streamlining of trade bureaucracy, energy and environmental standard-setting. While the interests of all the countries of the region must be taken into account, the countries with economies in transition should be accorded priority attention.

ECE influence should be maintained, particularly in those areas where it had proven advantages; and coordination with other international organizations and financial institutions should be enhanced. A new degree of cooperation between Governments and private enterprise was to be encouraged.

Cooperation between the regional commissions should also be fostered in the follow-up to the major international conferences.

Ms. KIMBLE (United States) said that her Government had been deeply involved in the reform efforts of the regional commissions and had been encouraged by the extremely significant and commendable measures adopted to date, particularly by the notable improvements in terms of transparency, prioritization, good governance, cost-effectiveness, responsiveness to the needs of members and greater cooperation.

In highlighting the efforts to increase transparency, she noted the distribution of detailed resource-use information in ECE, ESCAP and ECLAC, and highlighted the streamlining of conference structures by ECE, ECA and ESCAP. Her delegation looked forward to reviewing the Management Pilot Scheme proposed by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, as that proposal reflected innovative thinking on reform measures which could serve as a model for other United Nations bodies.

There was nevertheless a need to make the commissions fully cost-effective and even more responsive to the priorities of member States. In general, administrative support absorbed too great a percentage of budgetary resources. Similarly, duplication of activities within and outside the United Nations system should be avoided. The regional commissions must continue to refine their focus and identify their comparative advantage in order to ensure a unique and practical contribution to the development of their member countries. Furthermore, once reform measures were adopted, they should not be dismantled by members resistant to change.

She drew attention to the fact that the budgets for all five of the regional commissions had been increased for the next biennium. In her Government's opinion, that was a disturbing trend which required further consideration during the discussions of the United Nations budget for the 1998-1999 biennium. The process of streamlining, prioritization of activities and efforts to achieve greater cost-effectiveness in administration and work programmes required that increases should be allocated to priority

programmes which benefited the member States and not to overhead costs. In stressing the need to secure the ultimate objectives of streamlining and improved cost-effectiveness during the next biennium, she said that increases which did not meet the necessary criteria should not be approved.

In conclusion, she urged members to pursue reform of the regional commissions as a cooperative effort to make them as responsive as possible to the needs of the regions they served.

Mr. TAN Jian (China) said that the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of ESCAP focused on how the Commission would face the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century. Reforms of conference structures had been carried out to meet changing circumstances. In the same vein, all reform must take into account the needs of developing countries and be formulated on the basis of consensus. His delegation had proposed the formulation of a framework document for the twenty-first century including guidelines for development and cooperation for Asia and the Pacific in order to meet future challenges more effectively. Any attempt to weaken ESCAP under the pretext of reform was most undesirable.

Bridging the gap between developed and developing countries should be one of the Commission's main aims. To that end, there was a need for a more efficient allocation of resources to specifically identified priority fields of cooperation. To maximize the effects of such cooperation, existing mechanisms should be adjusted and improved in accordance with the priorities. Cooperation must also be backed by financial guarantees. He urged the developed countries to take greater responsibility for financial assistance, the transfer of technology and market access, on the basis of cooperation and mutual benefit.

Mr. ISAKOV (Russian Federation), endorsing the approaches to enhancing regional cooperation outlined in the Secretary-General's report (E/1997/40), said that his delegation was strongly in favour of strengthening the authority of the regional commissions, since they focused United Nations activities on the specific needs of regions and countries and ensured universal coverage. They also provided a unique mechanism for exchanging expertise in applied economy, which was particularly valuable to countries undergoing far-reaching transition.

The need for increased coordination between the regional commissions and other regional partners was particularly evident in Europe, where there were "competing" organizations such as the European Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as a plethora of subregional institutions. Cooperation between players must be enhanced in a spirit of partnership and complementarity, making optimal use of comparative advantages.

Regional reforms, particularly those carried out by EEC and ESCAP, had enabled activities to be focused on priority concerns, resulting in broader and more effective partnerships. Institutional structures and work methods were being streamlined, as reflected in the plan of action adopted at the jubilee session of EEC in April 1997. Only time would tell whether the new modes of operation should assume a more permanent character.

Cooperation between the regional commissions and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in the economic and social fields must be increased, and the efforts of EEC and ESCAP to that end were welcome.

Mr. EL KHAZEN (Lebanon) said that his Government welcomed the transfer of the permanent offices of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to Beirut and expressed its appreciation to Jordan, which had hosted the Commission for a number of years. The transfer was an incentive to ESCWA to enhance its effectiveness, and his Government was committed to providing every assistance to enable the Commission to carry out its tasks in the best possible way. The building housing ESCWA would also accommodate all the United Nations offices in Lebanon, in accordance with the relevant Council and General Assembly resolutions.

His delegation had noted the reform proposals for the United Nations, including the linking of administrative units, the introduction of a number of sectoral programmes and the elimination of duplication and competing activities, by ESCWA and other organizations. It had every confidence that ESCWA, under the skilful leadership of its Executive Secretary, would successfully implement its programmes with due regard for the aspirations of the member States seeking sustainable development. ESCWA activities and expertise had undoubtedly strengthened development and cooperation work in the region.

His Government was looking forward to the 1997 session of ESCWA, which coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the Commission's establishment, and expected all member States to participate at the highest level, thereby displaying their confidence in ESCWA as a regional bridge for activities in the economic and social spheres.

Mr. NOMAN (Observer for Yemen) said his delegation was very interested in the report on forthcoming ESCWA activities aimed at implementing structural and administrative reform and redefining the existing mechanisms. It appreciated the efforts involved in compiling the report, which focused on the most important issues for States in the region. In the case of Yemen, water resources and quality were of particular significance, and developments in that area required special focus if it was to benefit from technological progress.

The economic and social development of the region was a key issue and the member countries required assistance to achieve their integration into the international economy, to attract investment and to boost trade and cooperation with countries both within and outside the region. The importance of regional cooperation in the area of globalization was well known and it was necessary to strengthen and develop all forms of regional cooperation, particularly by enhancing the role of the regional commissions. ESCWA had sought to achieve integration and coordination among its member countries through its analytical and operational activities.

He took the opportunity to express his Government's appreciation of the assistance provided by ESCWA, stressing the need for continued and adequate funding of the Commission so as to allow further development of its work and strengthen its effectiveness.

Mr. HASSAN (Jordan), having welcomed the Secretary-General's report on regional cooperation (E/1997/40) and expressed his appreciation of the reports submitted by the executive secretaries of the regional commissions, said he wished to stress the need to strengthen the commissions, enhance their role in regional cooperation and improve their capacity to adapt to the specificities of their respective regions. It was most important that the regional and international dimensions of the United Nations approach to development should be integrated.

He welcomed the ESCWA programme of reform and its priorities for the coming years which were designed to increase the efficiency of the Commission's work and its contribution to the member States. Its analytical and research output should take place in tandem with practical and field-work operational activities to ensure optimal results for those States.

The Commission should pay special attention, in its research and consultancy programmes, to basic economic topics such as building up export economies, achieving sustainable development in the framework of a protected environment, fostering small and medium-sized projects in lower growth areas and carrying out research on water, agriculture and the use of state-of-the-art technology. It should also pay due attention to issues relating to poverty, social security and human-resource development, while promoting transparency, accountability, human rights and effective popular participation.

Ms. RIVERO (Observer for Uruguay), speaking on behalf of the member States and associated States of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), said that regional cooperation was of great importance for the process of regional integration. MERCOSUR had surpassed expectations by forming a customs union within five years of its establishment. It was also a mechanism through which the participating States opened themselves up to the exterior, since its regionalism was not a closed one.

The main objectives of regional integration included dismantling trade barriers, eliminating customs duties within the region, adopting a moderate external tariff and encouraging future enlargement. MERCOSUR also believed strongly that the achievement of a broader economic space would enhance its political significance. The aspiration to establish a hemispheric free trade area, was inextricably linked to the consolidation of MERCOSUR.

The current situation was a clear indication that close cooperation had developed in the Latin American and Caribbean region, a process in which the United Nations had played a major role through its decentralized and permanent presence. ECLAC had, for many years, been a source of inspiration for economic thought in the region and had contributed, since its inception, to the development of open-ended regionalism. It had promoted the strengthening

of economic and social development in the region and guided its member Governments in their adoption of appropriate economic and social policies within the framework of their strategic priorities.

MERCOSUR fully supported the ECLAC reforms aimed at improved incentives to allocate human and financial resources more effectively and eliminate duplication of activities which hampered efficiency. The various regional commissions were very different, but the ECLAC track record justified the confidence and appreciation of its member States. Reforms did not necessarily imply budget cuts and ECLAC fully deserved increased funding in view of its significant achievements. The need was rather for reforms that would adapt the Commission more closely to the particular requirements of the region. Consequently, any changes made to ECLAC should be tailored to the reality of the region and should not affect the Commission's institutional identity.

Mr. AL-MOBARAK (Observer for Saudi Arabia) said that there was a need to clarify the rules of the multilateral trading system with the assent of all the States members of the regional commissions. Globalization and liberalization involved challenges for the developing countries and required the goodwill of those who influenced international trade flows. The international organizations must assist the developing countries to adapt to the new trading system and ensure that they received their fair share of international trade. The alternative was their marginalization.

The regional commissions were an essential forum for dialogue and policy coordination between States; they created the necessary conditions for a balance between national policies and coordinated United Nations activities at the regional level. Economic integration was a gradual process which moved progressively from the national to the regional and ultimately to the international level. The regional commissions' role of research, analysis and operational activities had proved successful. He particularly appreciated the work of ESCWA and its efforts to set priorities which reflected changes at the regional and international levels. While his delegation supported General Assembly resolution 50/227, it hoped that its implementation would result in a strengthening of the regional commissions.

Mr. SRIVIHOK (Thailand) said that, through the Council, the regional commissions provided the General Assembly with analytical and policy input which fostered economic and social development and cooperation, assisted

in the implementation of the decisions reached at the major international conferences and brought United Nations activities closer to the specific development objectives of countries and the region to which they belonged.

The United Nations should thus focus on the regional dimensions of development, decentralization from headquarters to the field offices and cost-effective approaches to regional issues, by making greater use of the regional commissions.

His Government worked closely with ESCAP and was encouraging it to continue its reforms by streamlining its priorities, using its resources in a cost-effective manner, enhancing its accountability and transparency, facilitating coordination among development agencies at the regional level so as to avoid duplication, strengthening the role of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives (ACPR), facilitating a more regionally-centred role for the developing countries in the context of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and helping those countries to reap the benefits and reduce the risks of globalization.

His delegation supported ESCAP efforts to promote subregional and inter-subregional cooperation for trade and investment, poverty alleviation and development of human resources and infrastructure and recognized its role in promoting cooperation among United Nations bodies and other organizations. He urged the Council and the United Nations in general to provide the regional commissions, and particularly ESCAP, with the resources and support they needed to carry out their mandates.

Mr. AL-HUSSAMI (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that the continued efforts of ESCWA to develop the organs it needed to keep abreast of current economic developments had had a positive impact at the national and regional levels. The Commission also helped its member States to implement the resolutions and decisions adopted at major international conferences and to obtain development assistance, taking into account the specificities of individual cultures.

He was disappointed that the summary of the survey of economic and social developments in the ESCWA region, 1996-1997 (E/1997/45) had not pointed out that economic and social development in Western Asia would be impossible

as long as Israel continued to occupy territory in the region, thereby depriving other countries of a major part of their working population and precious land and hindering their social development.

The Commission played an important role in regional development and in the participation of the region's countries in the international community and must be provided with the resources it needed to carry out its mandate.

Mr. BARTOLO (Observer for Malta) said that in the economic and social, as in the political and security fields, United Nations use of the regional institutions was the only way that Governments could be certain that the institutions best equipped to undertake a task would do so.

ECE had carried out its own reform both comprehensively and transparently, taking into account the priorities of its member States. That process, which had resulted in a plan of action formally adopted in April 1997, had refocused activities, streamlined programmes and strengthened activities in the areas of environment, transport, statistics and trade facilitation.

As Vice-President of ECE during that period, Malta had been impressed by the political will of the member States to increase the Commission's relevance and effectiveness. His delegation supported strengthening the role of the regional commissions and was pleased to learn that the Secretary-General also considered that they had an important role to play.

Mr. RAEV (Observer for Bulgaria) said that his Government, which had supported the 1996-1997 reforms of the regional commissions aimed at streamlining their programme activities, achieving high efficiency and avoiding duplication, thought that they should focus on strategic areas of cooperation, particularly with other regional and subregional organizations. Those reforms would introduce a more homogeneous, transparent and cost-effective structure and ensure necessary staff redeployment in accordance with the decisions of the member States to reinforce, reduce or discontinue areas of cooperation.

The new ECE programme activities addressed the needs of the countries with economies in transition and reflected institutional changes such as the consolidation and enlargement of the European Union. He supported the statement by the Executive Secretary of ECE concerning models for

market-economy reforms in countries with economies in transition and the decision to make those countries one of the Commission's main priorities.

Mr. WAHID (Sudan) said that the world economic and social situation in general, and that of Africa in particular, was perplexing. The economies of the developed countries were booming, yet official development assistance (ODA) had decreased; Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) had risen, yet its share of international trade had decreased; and statistical improvements in the economies of African countries had not been reflected in an alleviation of the suffering of their peoples. Indeed, their situation had not only become more difficult but was also expected to deteriorate still further.

There was an urgent need for increased investment and financial flows to decrease Africa's heavy debt burden and ensure access of African goods to world markets, and ECA had an important role to play in achieving those aims. The regional commissions should be strengthened and should increase their coordination with each other and with other United Nations bodies. He welcomed the Secretary-General's recognition of the importance of the matter.

Mr. ENRICO (Argentina), having endorsed the statement by the spokesman for MERCOSUR, said that the ECLAC economic survey of Latin America and the Caribbean for 1996 demonstrated that the economies of the region were cooperating at all levels. His delegation supported the strengthening of ECLAC and its increased participation in a tripartite committee with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in support of the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA). ECLAC must be given the necessary resources to support LAFTA activities and to carry out its other functions.

His delegation was concerned, however, at the delays in the publication of various ECLAC publications, particularly in the field of social development, and emphasized their importance for microeconomic and macroeconomic analysis. It supported the proposal for optimum use of ECLAC experts and hoped that the tendency towards overdependence on external services could be avoided.

Mr. HUSSAIN (Observer for Iraq) said that the regional commissions enabled their member States to communicate their ideas at international forums and provided an opportunity for discussion of public policy with an emphasis

on specific regional needs. It must be remembered that economic underdevelopment in any country would have negative repercussions at both the regional and international levels.

The economic sanctions which had been imposed on some developing countries for political reasons had been a major obstacle to their social and economic development and to cooperation at the regional level and should be given priority in the discussions of the regional commissions. Iraq had suffered social and economic damage as a result of the sanctions imposed on it since 1990, which had hindered its efforts at post-war reconstruction and development and prevented it from participating in economic cooperation. The use of embargoes for political purposes should be regulated by the international community, especially because of their negative implications for development.

The summary of the survey of economic and social developments in the ESCWA region for 1996-1997 (E/1997/45, para. 17) stated that Iraq's economy had deteriorated as a result of United Nations imposed economic sanctions to such an extent that it currently ranked in the group of LDCs and that meaningful and urgently needed recovery could only be achieved with the total removal of those sanctions. He thus called on the international community to assume legal, political and ethical responsibility for the destruction of Iraq's economy and the imposition of poverty and ignorance on its people through such sanctions.

Mr. ZAHRAN (Observer for Egypt) said that cooperation was improving at the regional and subregional levels. Globalization and regionalization were complementary, not contradictory, trends and both the United Nations and national programmes must focus on regional elements in their international cooperative efforts.

Egypt was an active member of both ESCWA and ECA and his delegation thought that both commissions were to be commended on the reforms they had achieved. Regional commissions must avoid duplication with other bodies and undertake analytical studies focusing primarily on operational activities. Cooperation between regions must be strengthened, particularly with regard to the sharing of best experience and information.

Since adequate financial resources were the most important factor for ensuring the success of development projects, there should be greater

coordination with banks and other regional organizations. The regional commissions were in financial difficulties, and a large proportion of their field activities had to depend on extrabudgetary funds. Increased financing must be sought from a variety of sources, including donor countries outside the region concerned.

It was important to ensure cooperation between the three regions surrounding the Mediterranean, particularly in the transport and communications sectors. Given the limited funding, it was essential that regional commissions should focus on a restricted number of priorities.

Mr. CHAFIK (Observer for Morocco), having expressed support for the ECA reforms, called for the allocation of adequate resources to ensure their continuation. The Barcelona Declaration of 1995 had paved the way for a partnership between the European Union and the other Mediterranean countries with a view to creating a free trade zone by the year 2010. Cooperation over modernization of transport links was vital to regional economic integration.

The European Commission had financed some important studies on a variety of issues including transport infrastructure requirements in the Western Mediterranean, and environmental protection. A number of regional conferences had been held to address transport issues with a view to increasing efficiency, promoting cooperative research projects and meeting future transportation demands.

ECA and ECE were to be commended on their cooperative efforts which had resulted in a joint project for a Europe-Africa permanent link through the Strait of Gibraltar (E/1997/51). That link would be essential to developing North-South trade and would create some 25,000 permanent jobs. It was to be hoped that the Council would continue to monitor the project and provide support.

Mrs. STA. CATALINA (Philippines) said that the regional commissions facilitated the integrated implementation of a wide range of global commitments in the economic, social and environmental fields. They injected specific regional dimensions into the global setting, taking into account the wide disparities in development between countries and regions, and supported the effective participation of the developing countries in the evolving economic order. They were to be applauded for introducing reforms in

response to changing social, political and economic conditions throughout the world and were well placed to build consensus on cross-sectoral issues. They were also well-suited to strengthening South-South cooperation.

For effective socio-economic development, there must be close and well-defined coordination with regional and subregional groups possessing similar mandates, hence the importance of the regional coordinating system. Her delegation thus strongly supported the call for complementarity and integration amongst the regional players with a view to clarifying mandates and areas of specific concern in order to discourage duplication and competition over resources.

"Triangular cooperation" efforts involving regional commissions, subregional groupings and individual countries within a specific region had proved effective and merited further expansion. There should also be more efficient exchange of best practices and greater North-South cooperation at the regional level. Regional commissions could serve as vital intergovernmental machinery for the coordinated follow-up to the major world conferences.

Ms. McNISH (Jamaica) said that her Government attached great importance to the work of the regional commissions, since they provided a unique mechanism for intergovernmental collaboration and cooperation and greatly facilitated the promotion and implementation of the global commitment within the United Nations framework.

Her delegation noted with satisfaction the efforts undertaken to implement Council resolution 1996/41 and acknowledged the significant steps taken by ECLAC to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness. ECLAC continued to be recognized as a centre of excellence, and her Government was encouraged by the fact that other regional commissions were seeking to replicate the ECLAC measures.

Some aspects of the United Nations reform were systemic in nature and consequently required system-wide definition. Her delegation welcomed the establishment of the ad hoc working group as an innovative and insightful measure which provided a useful interactive mechanism for increased participation by member States.

As a member of the Caribbean Development Cooperation Committee (CDCC), Jamaica was interested in ensuring that the benefits of reform would accrue to

the Caribbean subregion. Her delegation would have appreciated, in the reports of the Secretary-General and the remarks made by the ECLAC Executive Secretary, some information on the relationship between ECLAC and subregional bodies, such as the Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM) and MERCOSUR, as well as with the other regional commissions.

With regard to follow-up to the major international conferences, her delegation welcomed the efforts by ECLAC to assist its member countries in implementing the outcomes of those conferences, but had hoped for an integrated and coordinated approach to cross-cultural themes.

Her delegation was gratified at the level of confidence in ECLAC that the Secretariat had shown through the establishment of the Management Pilot Scheme. The overall process of decentralization and delegation of authority should enhance the manner in which institutions at the regional and subregional levels operated.

The summary of the economic survey of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1996 (E/1997/43) gave short shift to the Caribbean. The issue of reporting on economic trends in the Caribbean had been raised on several occasions but, while there had been some marginal improvement, the subregion continued to be given very cursory treatment in the Commission's reporting exercise. Indeed, in the remarks by the ECLAC Executive Secretary, mention of the subregion was conspicuously absent.

In addition to the activities included under the Caribbean subprogramme, ECLAC activities of an analytical and operational nature should give more effective and specific consideration to the characteristic aspects of the Caribbean economies. In that regard, her delegation wished to propose that separate reports should be prepared for the two subregions of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mr. KAABACHI (Tunisia), having noted the Secretary-General's report on regional cooperation (E/1997/40) and paid tribute to the Executive Secretary of ECA, said that, despite the economic and social progress achieved by almost all the African countries in the past year, the economic indicators remained disturbing. He thus urged the international community to increase its financial and technical assistance to the region.

The United Nations system in general and the ECA in particular were crucial to the reconstruction, rehabilitation and development of Africa.

Through its ambitious reform and revitalization programme, ECA was called upon to take an active role in the consolidation and strengthening of the economic and social capacities of the African countries and the stimulation of subregional and regional economic integration.

Decentralization and the strengthening of the resources of the five multinational programming and operational centres (MULPOC) constituted an important step towards reinforcement of the Commission's presence at the subregional level. Through that redeployment of resources, the impact of the MULPOC was expected to increase and they should intensify their efforts to guide and facilitate economic integration in the various subregions. In that regard, his Government hoped that cooperation and coordinated action between the North African subregional centre and the Arab Maghreb Union would be developed.

It was imperative that ECA should have adequate financial and human resources to carry out its reform programme and support sustainable and integrated development in Africa. African needs were enormous and ECA must be given resources commensurate with the magnitude of its task.

Mr. DAKA (Zambia) said that ECA deserved praise for the reforms it had carried out with a view to enhancing quality, cost-effectiveness and partnership. The African region needed its Commission more than ever before, particularly for poverty eradication in rural areas. A solution must be found to the continuing debt crisis which constituted an obstacle to its economic development and, despite recent improvements, its terms of trade were still negative. It was to be hoped, therefore, that ECA would receive adequate funding from the regular budget of the United Nations to meet the many challenges that lay ahead.

The African Economic Community, launched at the recent summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Harare, would be working towards the integration of all African subregional economic communities and organizations, and ECA could make a major contribution to the process.